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SCOTTISH MYTHS FROM ONTARIO.¹

IN a certain part of Ontario (my stories being true, I must be reticent as to localities and persons) the country is peopled with Scotch Highlanders from Glenelg. If, as is often said, Scotch people are superstitious, the Glenelg men are superlatively so. Every nook and every grassy plot in that famous glen is haunted, and weird tales belong to every family, high and low, handed down from father to son. The Glenelg men in Canada whom I knew still have the traditional tales, — the ancestral ones, I mean, — and are very willing to tell them : but I greatly preferred to hear them recount the uncanny doings of their own Canadian township. They are the third generation in this country. It is an old part of Ontario, — one of the oldest, I think, for in a long-discarded burying-ground I found inscriptions bearing date of the last century. Although so long here, and tolerably fair farmers, they are curiously backward, preferring in their daily life to talk Gaelic ; and it is even now very common to find children of eight without a word of English. Most of the very old people have only their native tongue. Their schools are so poor that it is difficult to believe one's self in Ontario, where the standard of education is so high. They are handsome people, — nearly all very tall and well-built, bearing a family likeness. The men have none of the farmer slouch so usual in most country places ; they are thorough Highlanders of the best type, and have the traditional grace and condescension of manner, even when speaking to an acknowledged superior. The impression of refinement is intensified by their speech. They came to this country understanding only Gaelic, had no schools until the present generation, and therefore received the whole of their education in church. Their speech is Scripture English, quaint, careful, and accurate. It was at first an astonishment to me, as my knowledge of rural life in western Ontario had prepared me to expect from farmers everywhere the horrible colloquialisms, nasal twang, and most wonderful idioms which perhaps some Montrealers have noticed in the townships, for it is the same there, I believe. It was a great pleasure to me to listen to the polished old English, and I soon recognized the cause, and was interested, and perhaps startled, to discover that the beautiful speech of one of the least progressive counties of Ontario is directly owing to the neglect of the government — in short, to their want of education.

It was not long before I discovered with deep, silent delight that the country-side was peopled with ghosts. It was never hard to give a turn to the conversation that would result in the recital of some-

¹ Paper read before the American Folk-Lore Society, Montreal Branch, 1893.

thing weird or horrible, told with the bare simplicity of the doings of the Witch of Endor, and not doubted in any particular by another than myself. I remember that this difference between them and me threatened to disturb my enjoyment. I am always uncomfortable if "in my company but not of it," and therefore always agree with every one unless positively forbidden to do so by a company too intense for a happy existence. In the present instance, as my infidelity was unsuspected, I was not hindered from assuming the sentiment of the hour as a garment which I heartily enjoyed wearing, and which soon belonged of right to me, — so much so, in fact, that when the first of the following stories was related in the deepening dusk in a most ghostly hollow behind a graveyard, it was I who, when deep-drawn breaths announced the finale, suggested that we arm ourselves with cudgels and hasten home across the fields. And we did it, too, no one laughing; it was not an hour for laughter. We walked in Indian file, following the cow-path, and I think that I surreptitiously held the coat-tail of the one who strode before me. And as we walked, we thought that we heard the malevolent and fatal tap, tap, tapping in the wood across the hollow. But this is anticipating the dénouement of my tale. Here is the story of —

THE HAUNTED GROVE.

A certain man whom it is safe to call Angus, as there was at least one Angus in every household, lived near the stage road that connected two large villages, which were, if I remember aright, about fourteen miles apart. His home was situated nearly midway between them, and about a mile from the aforementioned hollow. He seems to have taken more interest in the post-office than his friends whom I knew, and subscribed for and studied certain Montreal newspapers. For this he was pitied in the parish, and called "Poor Angus," for the general sentiment of the place was opposed to literature, and reading was considered a sign of mental weakness. He appears to have adhered, however, to the habit, whether from native independence or native imbecility, I cannot say. I have noticed that as a means of separating a man from his fellows, either strength or weakness, if sufficiently pronounced, is equally potent. So this man, following the bent of his nature, went twice or thrice a week to the post-office late in the afternoon, when the passing stage threw in a big leather mail-bag. The post-office was in a farmhouse, and to reach it he walked through the hollow with the unwholesome reputation. On the slope of the hill farthest from the post-office was a grove, not a dense wood, — just about half an acre of thinly wooded land, the trees being so far apart that you could easily get glimpses and peeps of the country beyond. I remember once admiring a pink sunset scantily visible among the dark trunks of those trees.

Well, one autumn afternoon Angus was ascending this hill on his way home with his newspapers, when in the grove on his right suddenly sounded the chopping of a tree. He stopped, interested at once. The grove belonged to a neighbor and cousin of his own, and it had been for very many years left undisturbed. I think it very possible that it was a "sugar bush," that is, a wood reserved for sugar-making, but of this I cannot be sure. But if my guess is right it would account for the surprise he felt at the cutting down of a tree there. He went to the fence, or rather stone dike, for that is one of the very few parts in which you find fields inclosed by stone dikes in lieu of fences, as in Scotland. The chopping continued, though he saw no one, and he moved along, expecting every moment to see man and axe. Finally he shouted. To his intense astonishment there was no reply, although it was incredible that he was unheard by a person in so near vicinity. As the echo of his shout died away, the chopping, which for a moment or two had been suspended, began again. A curious horror crept over the listener, and he looked no more, but made haste up the hill, and turning the corner was soon at home. He said nothing about the matter on this first occasion, and a few days later was again on the road returning from the same errand, when, lo! on the quiet air came again the same chop, chop, chopping. In telling it afterwards, he said that in his heart he made no fight against fate, but he just thought sadly of his worldly affairs, and wondered if things were in good shape for him to leave wife and little ones, for from that hour he confidently looked for death before another spring. He stood long listening, and when at last he went home he related the whole circumstance to his wife. Together they recounted it to friends, who went in parties and singly to the place, but heard nothing. They also thoroughly searched the little wood, arguing that chopping must leave signs behind in the shape of chips and disfigured trunks. But no, there was no mark of any kind in any part of the grove. Angus was now earnestly counselled to abandon his literary pursuits. He could not but own that he had received a warning, and he did own it, but contended that it was undeserved, and refused to be guided, as one might say, by a light that, as all admitted, shone with a lurid glare. He was exhorted to forswear the reading of vain and foolish lies; for with the acumen which surprised and gratified me so much, they even refused to regard our newspapers as mediums of information, recognizing instinctively their right to stand in the ranks of fiction. Their advice was in all points save one unheeded. With one voice they bade him, if he heard the warning again, to pursue his way as if he heard it not, looking neither to the right nor left. This counsel he followed, and the end shows the folly and uselessness of attempting to elude a menace which is — well, which is of this kind.

Angus continued to walk to and from the post-office, and when alone never failed to hear the mysterious axe at work in the wood. He never heard it unless alone, and it was never heard by any one else. Although the conviction that his death would happen before many months took firm hold of his mind, yet in time he became so accustomed to the thought and its cause as to go about his usual occupations with much of the wonted interest, and even to hear the sound of an axe, wielded by invisible hands, without experiencing agitation.

Weeks sped on and brought winter, and an unusual fall of snow. The stage-road became blocked, and vehicles left the highway to make a new track through the fields. For several months that winter the real road through the hollow was not used, and the snow, which drifted high in it, covered the dikes on each side. Temporary roads and footpaths made winding lines over the white plains on every hand. Angus now followed one of these roads, which ran parallel to the real highway, just the dike being between them, until he reached the grove, when he, with extraordinary and fatal hardihood, instead of remaining in it, used to leave it, and striking out at right angles to it, would walk through the grove, aiming directly for his own house, and greatly shortening his walk thereby. The trees had of course protected the place from wind; there had been no drifting, and walking was easy. He told it at home, and said with grim humor that the Man in the Bush seemed pleased that he would come that way, for his chopping was louder and gladder than ever before; and his wife repeated her counsel earnestly that he look only straight before him, and never stop, nor answer any sound, nor take heed in any way of that unholy work. "And," said the Angus who years after related it to me, "the Axe might well be merry when she bade him that way!" But Angus laid the advice to heart, and strode steadily through the grove, looking straight before him, and every day the Axe grew gayer and louder. He did not speak of it now. He was getting used to it, and the neighbors had ceased to think of it, the more easily because, as I have told, his literary tastes had separated this Angus from among them. So one day the owner of the grove and his sons went over to chop down one particular tree that, on the day when they had searched the grove in the autumn, had appeared to them to merit destruction. Perhaps it was a beech growing among maples, where it was not wanted, or perhaps it was a dead maple cumbering the ground. They began to chop. It was late in the afternoon. One said with a laugh, "It may be we are taking the tree that poor Angus' ghost has been working at so long."

Perhaps the invisible man heard them. At any rate he did not chop that evening. It was only his cousin's axe that gave the good

strokes that poor Angus heard as he turned from the track to cross the grove as usual. The tree was swaying and shivering, and all but ready to fall. He had cut trees all his life, and he knew the sound of the stroke when the task was almost done ; but no goblin's trick would beguile him into turning his head. He looked neither to right nor left. Then the chopping ceased, and his blood nearly froze as he heard his own name shouted in tones of such horror that a familiar voice was unrecognized. Others caught up the cry. There was a din, the crashing of branches and sound of rushing feet, mingled with shouts of warning, and poor Angus fell, with the enormous tree upon him. When at last the burden was removed, and the crushed body borne home, there were men there who heard among the trees inhuman laughter, and knew that Something had lured poor Angus to his doom.

Another weird tale, that made a strong impression on me, I wrote down at the time, and called —

THE FATED FAGOT.

The title seemed very effective then, though now it strikes me as more alliterative than true, as it concerns a single stick and not a fagot at all. It was a round stick about five feet long, probably the trunk of a young ash tree brought home from the woods to serve some purpose as a pole. It lay forgotten in the back yard of a farmhouse close to a little village called L——. It was a fine strong pole about twice as thick as a man's wrist. The sun seasoned it day by day, so that it soon was no longer "green" wood, but wood that would have crackled well in the fire. But for whatever purpose it had been brought home, it seemed oddly forgotten. No use was made of it.

One day one of the young men of the family went to the "bush," spent an hour there, and returned with just such another long, straight sapling. He dragged it into the yard, and his eye fell on the first one. "There," said he, "I've had little to do spending my time seeking a pole, and this one ready to my hand all the while."

"Aye," said Mary his sister, standing in the doorway, "that is what I'm telling them. Since that pole was brought, father has taken a bar from the gateway, and Neil has cut down a young tree in the pasture, and you've been seeking in the bush, all of you wanting this same pole that's only lying in the way."

"Perhaps there'll be something the matter with it, Mary," her brother answered, ever ready to suspect black art; "any way, it is dry now, and I'll chop it for you, and it will soon be out of harm's way."

And Mary, bidding him do it at once, — for she was then wanting some firewood, — turned into the house.

The young man went, whistling, for his axe, and the pole would have been in half a dozen pieces in a few moments had not a neighbor hailed him from the road. Throwing down the axe, he went to the fence to speak with him, calling meantime to a little brother to gather sticks and chips for Mary. So Mary, or rather *Maari*, for they always pronounced the familiar name just as it is spelled in some of William Black's Scotch novels, cooked the midday meal, but not with the elusive pole of which she had intended to make a speedy end. But she did not forget it; on the contrary, it seemed to prey on her mind. As if fascinated, she would go out and look at it. She dragged it into the woodshed, that its destiny might seem more sure. She recommended it to the men of the family as being small and suited to the stove, but still it remained uncut. Sometimes they said that they could not find it, at other times it was forgotten. If just about to cut it, they were sure to be interrupted. Mary took the axe herself to chop it, one day, but a brother laughingly took it from her and sent her back to the house, promising to follow with an armful of sticks in a few minutes; but he failed to keep his word, for a young colt broke loose and needed his immediate attention to prevent its reaching the highway!

One morning a wagon drove up with a family party from a distance, come to spend the day. Mary welcomed them, and the little house was all bustle and noise while the visitors were being made comfortable. A dinner fit for the occasion must be prepared, and Mary sent her brother in haste to the woodshed that the oven might be heated at once. He came back with an armful.

"I would have cut the stick that vexes you so much, Maari," he said, "but it seems gone at last out of our way. Some one has cut it before me."

"No," replied the girl, "here it is." And as she spoke a weight seemed to fall on her spirits, for she did not smile again, but moved amongst her guests preoccupied and still. The pole was lying close to the kitchen door, along the path leading from the woodshed. The young man thinking it in the way and apt to make people stumble, took it to the shed and threw it in.

Dinner was over, and all the news discussed, and it was the middle of the afternoon when Mary was observed by some one of the family to be standing in the kitchen doorway alone. I think it was her mother who, wondering at her staying there so long, went to her. She was shivering violently, although it was pleasant weather, and she pointed her finger, without speaking, to the pole, which lay at her feet in the pathway again. One of the boys was told to go at

once and chop it in pieces; and Mary was kindly chided for her foolish terror. The visitors began to bestir themselves, for they had a lonely drive before them.

"I will leave the cutting of the stick until they are on the road," said Mary's brother; and he went to get out their horses and "speed the parting guests." Farewells were said in hearty fashion at the gate, and then the family hastened to take up their interrupted tasks, separating, some to one thing and some to another; and yet again the stick was forgotten.

The evening meal was late, and Mary was hurried. A little daughter of one of the neighbors, who was in, bustled about, helping. She flew in and out with chips.

"Shall I drag this pole out of the way, Maari?" asked the child.

"No," said Mary; "*it is too late.*"

And there at the kitchen door it remained, and Mary was pale and silent, her thoughts being elsewhere. That night they were roused from sleep by her cry for help, and when they went to her they found her sick unto death. A doctor was fetched in haste; it was cholera morbus, and hopeless, as he knew at once, and before the sun rose Mary was dead. The stick lay at the door, and one of the kindly neighbors, who were doing what was needful during the following days, lifted it and sawed it carefully in two to serve as rests for the coffin, by means of which the bearers could convey it to the grave; and thus the fated stick fulfilled its mission.

Another tale floats in my memory, enfolding the unwonted image of a —

BLUE BUTTERFLY,

which measured nearly four inches across the extended wings. The color and size suggest a moth rather than a butterfly, do they not? Whatever it was, it was sufficiently rare to attract a great deal of notice, but not of the scientific sort. An unknown object was sure to be regarded with suspicion; and this butterfly fluttered one July over a certain farm, secure from ill because of the awe with which it was regarded. It was constantly watched, and cautiously pursued. Its most innocent actions became weighty, and were subject to much misconstruction. Some one discovered by gruesome experience that the glance of its minute eye could convey a shudder. Its friendliness was suspected. Well, by an unfortunate coincidence, at this very time the churning of butter on this farm was not attended with success. This fact impressed my friends more than it did me, for I reflected grimly that their butter very generally was not a brilliant issue. This had resulted in my eating honey very extensively during my visits to them. However, I repressed any unkind thoughts on

the subject, and assisted with much pleasure in the discussion regarding the doings of the butterfly. It is, moreover, probable that what they complained of was not bad butter, but cream that would not be butter at all. This state of things had begun with the advent of the butterfly and continued in spite of everything done to counteract the evil influence too evidently at work. The community was aroused — *all but one person*. A certain woman who lived alone and refused to know her neighbors evinced no interest in our investigations. She knew of them, and sneered weird Gaelic sneers, which were translated to me, and at which I shook my head according to custom. This woman did not go to church, which was an extreme of wickedness all but unknown there. I do not know if she were insane or only original, but she was certainly at war with the sentiments of the community.

Well, for three weeks she scoffed, the butterfly fluttered, the butter "did not come," and we ventilated the subject, which naturally increased in interest and bulk. At the end of those three weeks one man set his teeth firmly, armed himself with a wet towel, and sallied out to meet the mysterious insect single-handed. This man was directly interested in the sale of the butter. He met the foe only a few yards from the house, and got the better of it at once by one fell blow. All gathered round to see it. I did not see it, and I never saw it living either. From description it was a beautiful specimen. When I heard of its death I was angry. I had not intended serious consequences to any of the actors in this idyl, and was indignant for an hour. At the end of that time I was startled to hear that the poor lonely woman had been found dead. Her body was discovered on the ground near her own door. It was seen by passers-by not twenty minutes after the butterfly's destruction, and her life had not been extinct much more than a quarter of an hour. Comment is needless, as was felt at the time, little being said, but much conveyed by nods and shaking of heads. As if to complete the chain of evidence, next day the butter came !

The particular characteristic of these tales appears to me to be their picturesqueness. They are more dramatic than "shop" ghost stories usually are, and the situations and accessories are romantic. I have some other stories of the superstitious kind gathered among a totally different "folk," and with two exceptions they have not seemed to me worth remembering. The two I except are interesting only by reason of the difficulty of arriving at any rational theory in explanation of them. They have no prettiness nor romance about them ; they are simply *creepy*. But this is a digression, as I am not going to tell them now. I will just remark before returning to my

Glenelg friends, that in one of these two *difficult* tales of mine I was myself an active participator in the plot, and conversed at length with the ghost, — quite calmly, too, for I thought all the time that he was in the flesh. It is something to mourn over, that such an opportunity should present itself and be neglected, — an opportunity to “catch a ghost, and tame it, and teach it to do tricks,” and realize fabulous proceeds!

Well, to return. The lore of my Scotch friends was like themselves. I admired them very much. Sometimes certain persons and circumstances surround us when we are uplifted in soul, and we see them bathed in light, glorified, as it were, by roseate hues of our own conjuring. Knowing this, I was often afraid that I created the transforming light in which they appeared to me to move. It used, therefore, to give me great happiness when something would happen that proved the charm to be objective; as, for instance, when one of these unlettered men unconsciously reëchoed a sentiment from the mysterious thinker whom we call Thomas à Kempis, and almost in the same words enunciated the truth that of the mysteries of the supernatural “no one can with safety speak who would not rather be silent.” And they were silent, and profoundly reverent. These pretty goblin tales lack the element of “research,” and are not profane; they are only fantasies.

I have yet another to tell, and the telling of it gives me a sense of guilt, for it was given to me by stealth, having assumed such proportions that the recounting it was denounced publicly in church, the denunciation being accompanied by threat of excommunication. It is much the same as the Butterfly tale, and bears a striking resemblance to certain German wehr-wolf legends. It is not about a wolf, however, the chief actor being —

A BLACK DOG.

One harvest time, forty or fifty years ago (or perhaps more), in a certain farmhouse not a mile from the grove where poor Angus met with sudden death, very strange things were observed. Pails left at night in trim rows on benches ready for the morning milking would be found, when required, on the barn floor, or on top of a hay-rick, or in some other equally unsuitable situation. A spade might be searched for in vain until some member of the family, climbing into bed at night, would find it snugly reposing there before him. Pillows were mysteriously removed, and found sometimes outdoors at a distance from the house. Screws were removed from their places, and harness hung up in the stable was taken apart. The family were rendered materially uncomfortable, and did their best to become also immaterially miserable by searching for proofs of supernatural agency.

A great deal of proof was forthcoming; the matter was soon beyond doubt, and nothing else was talked about than the condition of things on this farm. Many speculations were afloat; every tiny occurrence was examined as possibly affording evidence in the matter. When a large black dog, evidently without owners, was observed to frequent the vicinity, the eye of the populace was at once upon it. It was shy, hiding and skulking about a good deal, and it was always hard to discover when sought. The owner of the land was strongly advised to shoot it, and the popular distrust was increased when he did one day fire at it without producing any visible results, the dog being seen a few hours later in excellent health. The interest excited was so great that when a "bee" was held on this farm for something connected with the harvest the attendance was immense, quite unusually so, and the neighbor women came in to help in the preparation of supper on an extensive scale. Some of the men made a long table of boards to accommodate the company. The women spread cloths and arranged dishes and viands. When all was ready, they regarded it with approval, pleased especially with the shining of the long rows of plates and the whiteness of the linen: then some of them took the dinner-horn and went out to give the signal to the men, who were at some distance away. The other women went to the cook-house, where in summer the kitchen stove stood, and the supper table was left alone. A few minutes later, when all gathered around it again, chaos reigned where order had been. The cloth was spotted with symmetrical shapes, a tiny heap of dust and sand was on every plate, and the knives were on the floor. The disorder was of a strangely methodical kind, the same quantity of dust being on every plate, while each knife was placed in the same position as his fellows. The men trooped in whilst the women were staring aghast, and great was their indignation.

"Give me your gun," cried one, "and I'll put in this silver bit with the charge, and see if it will not make an end of such work."

And just then the dog was seen prowling about at the foot of the yard near a thicket of bushes where he probably was often concealed. The gun was fired; it carried a silver bullet, and this time the aim was true, for all saw that the animal was shot. The day had been warm, and they were tired out, and did not go to make sure of results at once. They sat around the rearranged board for an hour or more before some of them sauntered down to see the vanquished enemy. They did not wonder at first to find no trace of a dog, as, like any other wounded animal, it was likely to creep into the thicket to die. But the thicket was small, and was soon explored on hands and knees. Nothing was there; and the body of that dog was never seen by mortal, although the search grew hourly more diligent and

thorough. And whilst they searched, there came a boy running from a stone house not far distant, bidding them to come over with him quickly, for grandfather was dead. "He dragged himself into the house," said the child, "as though he were hurt, an hour ago, and lay down on his bed, and now he is dead."

Friends hastened over, but were met at the door by the dead man's wife, terrified and weeping, but almost forbidding them to enter. For some unfortunate reason, the poor woman would not let them near the body, little knowing, I suppose, the suspicion in their minds and the construction which must inevitably be put on her demeanor.

This story concerns a man who is, I should think, grandfather and great-grandfather to a fifth of the population of that township, and it assumed such proportions that, as I have stated, mention of it was prohibited, long years afterwards, by a clergyman now living in the county of Bruce. It is to this day a little difficult for the descendants of the man who died that long-ago harvest-time to marry out of their own connection. If one of them should ever aspire to represent his county in parliament, the enemy will assuredly come to the front with the Black Dog.

Now, I have told such of the weird stories of that county as I best remember. I heard many more, but they are wholly or partially forgotten; fragments of them I retain. One is especially to be regretted because it was what is called well authenticated, having been noised abroad sufficiently to be noticed by some newspaper, which naturally produced an inquiry. It was considered in that region to be *the* ghost story *par excellence*. I was tempted to try and relate it at length in this paper, but found that I could not do so without supplying from fancy what would take the place of forgotten details. It is a story of a desecrated grave. I was shown the grave. The body of a young girl was stolen from it the night after burial, taken to a neighboring village and concealed in a tavern stable, the intention being to convey it next day to Montreal; but that very night the girl herself appeared in a dream to her father, telling him where her body then lay, naming the guilty parties, and giving a perfectly accurate account of the robbery, describing the road taken through fields, and a discussion that actually had taken place regarding the advisability of taking the coffin, that is, the possibility of such theft making prosecution easier in the event of discovery. The father roused friends, who accompanied him to the village, and the body was discovered in exactly the position described in his dream and recounted by him on their way thither.

Although I do not, in this or any such story, accept the supernatural theory, I cannot explain it. It has never been explained.

It belongs to a country peopled with unearthly shapes, the offspring of poetic natures, wholly uninformed, and possibly the conditions are favorable to "manifestations." "He who desires illusions," you know, "shall have them beyond his desire."

I am reluctant to leave the subject, there is so much to tell, for the writing of this paper has revived incidents that seemed quite forgotten. I would like to talk about a certain lonely carpenter shop, in which, before a death, the sound of plane and hammer used to be heard at night, and we were compelled to believe that the ghost of the sick one was, with officious if not indecent haste, making his coffin. As he was not yet a ghost, that is, not yet disembodied, there was a confusion of thought here. On some occasions he added to the nuisance by burning a candle which extinguished of its own accord if approached.

A personage whom they called the Evil One was not infrequently encountered by individuals in lonely places. I was accustomed to hearing of these meetings, and therefore was much surprised at the indignation shown against a certain young fellow of a frivolous disposition, who claimed to have had such an experience. I inquired of a clergyman, who knew the locality well, the reason of the young man's narrative being received with disfavor. He laughed very heartily while he explained that a visit from the Prince of Darkness was regarded as proof of the highest sanctity, and was therefore the privilege only of persons aged and of long-established preëminence in the church. The young man was disturbing the traditions.

I was a little shocked to hear of a repulsive superstition which I have read of as being peculiar to certain parts of England, — I mean a horrible vampire story given in explanation of the ravages often made in a family by consumption. I did not meet this superstition myself, but was told that it was among them. Consumption was rife among them ; it seemed to be hereditary. They looked so remarkably robust, and yet fell so easily a prey to this disease, and it seldom lingered ! It was nearly always a very rapid illness. These are sad memories. The matter always seemed so hopeless ! In a sick-room superstition ceases to be either funny or graceful. I stood by sick-beds with a sore heart, knowing too well that the haste with which a doctor was procured would be fully equalled by the zeal with which his orders would be disregarded. They had faith in the physician, the man, but none whatever in his prescriptions. There were two doctors, whom I may call Dr. X. and Dr. Z. Each had his admirers, who vaunted his superiority.

I stopped one day on the road to inquire, of a man whom I met, after the health of some of his neighbors.

"Oh," said he, "they would soon be well if they would see Dr. Z. They'll be having Dr. X. all the time, and I do not see that they're gaining at all."

I said something in defence of Dr. X.

"Well, Miss F., I'll just tell a story that will let you know the difference between these two doctors," said my friend. "My father was once laid up very bad with a cold that he could not get rid of, and we sent for Dr. X., who gave him a phial of medicine. Well, next day our neighbor, John McM., came in, and seeing my father no better, he said, 'Oh, you should have had Dr. Z.; but I'll soon put that right for you.' Straightway he went back to his own house for a bottle that had been a year or two there, of Dr. Z.'s mixing. It had been in the house since his father died, but they were not sure that it had been some of his medicines. They had forgotten all about it, and the paper of writing had come off; so they did not know how much to take, but they just took the writing on Dr. X.'s bottle for a guide, and poured out a spoonful for my father, who began to mend at once, and was out at work in three or four days after."

This tale moved me so much that I went to the side of the road and sat down on a log to thoroughly take it in and fix it in my memory. When I believed that I had it safely, I asked gently, "Murdoch, what if it had been a liniment and poisonous?"

My friend drew himself up, his face aglow with faith in Dr. Z., and replied proudly, "Dr. Z. never gives poisons; he always gives healthy medicines."

But I am going from one story to another, and lengthening my "uncanny folk-lore" unwarrantably. To repeat myself, it is hard to leave these reminiscences.

Like the ghost of a dear friend dead
Is time long past.

But before closing I would like to say to those who speak of *authentic* ghost stories, that nothing will make one so thoroughly sceptical regarding them as entering into them heartily, and, so to say, assisting in their composition. I used to wish them true with all my heart. I earnestly desired to believe them, for I was lonely, and this supplied excitement; but being behind the scenes, I was unable to shut my eyes to their origin. On one occasion, when a man was relating to me a peculiarly attractive narrative, I perceived in it a flaw, or a lack of sequence which would be a weak place in his chain of evidence. I made a remark, a *sideways* remark, which I meant to serve as suggestion without showing that I saw the fault. I saw the idea take. He was excited, and did not realize that I had drawn his attention to the weak place, which he immediately bridged over, mate-

rially changing the story in doing so. He was an honorable man, who would have scorned a deliberate falsehood ; but scarcely an hour later I heard him retail the altered narrative and offer to give every detail on oath as perfectly accurate. He knew that I heard him, and in fact he appealed to me as having been the first hearer. He was entirely unconscious that I had assisted him to manufacture the most valuable part of the evidence. I did not confess. I think it wrong to spoil a good story. But I am quite certain that ghost-seers, even if they are mighty men who edit reviews, are not, and cannot be, reliable witnesses.

C. A. Fraser.